

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE LAW AND JUSTICE INTERIM COMMITTEE,
THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2016 MADE ON BEHALF OF THE GALLATIN COUNTY
FRESH START RE-ENTRY PROGRAM**

The Fresh Start Re-Entry Program of Gallatin County has been in operation since October, 2014. It is the only grassroots program of its kind in Montana.

In the months of doing business, our Program Coordinator, Tiffani Pimley, the Executive Committee of the Program task force and the Task Force's close to 50 members have become keenly aware of the importance of housing to the success of participants in re-Entry. In fact, access to housing is absolutely the most critical key to successful re-entry, hence a key factor in reducing recidivism in our County. Lack of housing impacts community safety, families with children to say nothing of the person who is trying to turn a life around. We have a very short window of time (try 48 hours!) to make a difference in a participant's life—housing is essential to insuring a person's getting off to a good start, of making it. Getting a job, getting one's finances in order, attending to health concerns, attending to other issues---all seem to be nearly impossible, if not so, when one does not have a roof over head!

Recent statistics taken from our Program speak to the problem of homelessness in Gallatin County---of the 133 individuals we have worked with, 44% were homeless or living with family or friends. Going without a roof over head or returning to the situation that got one in trouble in the first place is not good....just plain tough to make it.

I share 2 stories to make my point.....

Mr. D has been in and out of the Gallatin County Detention Center (GCDC) for the past couple of years---on mostly alcohol related charges. When he came to Bozeman, he was able to stay with friends but quickly became homeless due to his inability to control his alcohol addiction. Mr. D ended up on Misdemeanor probation, was unable to keep a job for any length of time and would end up back in the GCDC. When speaking with Mr. D, he addressed his biggest struggle, other than the inability to get a handle on his addiction to alcohol, was his lack of housing. While he was able to hold a job for short periods of time, he was unable to complete other probation requirements because he was unable to find a place to live. Mr. D explained his situation in this manner "If I don't have a place to live, I can't shower, wash my clothes, get any sleep, and what person wants to hire a person that looks bad and smells bad." During a recent "stay" at the GCDC, he met with the re-entry coordinator; they began working on a re-entry plan to assist him in meeting his needs and getting rid of the barriers that were preventing him from being successful--first and foremost was housing. If there are appropriate housing options, many require a large down payment. Our community is lucky to a few housing options but as it goes, those options are full up and have a lengthy waiting

list. When Mr. D was released, we were able to piece together some living arrangements until he could get into a transitional living house. As of today, Mr. D is living in that house and has not returned to GCDC. When asked about his situation, he replied, "now that I have a place to live, I have a job and have been able to keep it because I am reliable, I don't smell, and my clothes are clean. I have also been able to follow through with what I have to do for probation. If I was back on the street, I would be back in jail-- I have no doubt about that."

Ms. Z was in a very similar situation as Mr. D; homeless, jobless, and unable to meet the requirements of her probation. Not only does Ms. Z struggle with addiction, she also has mental health issues that go unaddressed when she is homeless. She found herself doing what she could to make it and ended up using again because "she just couldn't make it like that anymore". Ms. Z found herself at the GCDC, scared and anxious about what was going to happen to her once she was released. As she struggled with addiction, she came to realize that it was absolutely essential that she have a place to live, a place where she could remain sober, meet with her sponsors, and feel safe and secure. Ms. Z worked with the re-entry coordinator to create a re-entry plan; together, they worked to find housing for Ms. Z that would allow her the case management support she needed to keep her on track. As of today, Ms. Z has been out of jail for approximately 3 months, has been able to deal with her mental health and addiction needs, has been able to attend all of her probation meetings, secured 2 jobs. She states that she is doing better than she ever has in the past. She continues-- "If I didn't have a place to go and was let back out on the street, I would be back in jail the next day---- I am sure of it. That's always how it has been before."

These two people are fortunate; others are not.

We are grateful for the work that the State Re-Entry Task Force has done on the issues surrounding the lack of housing which severely impacts the success of those in re-entry. We are proud of our efforts in Gallatin County to empower very special people to turn their lives around---we all win when they do! Again, our most critical need is housing--we need your help!

I thank you for hearing my testimony this morning. Again, I repeat-- securing adequate housing is essential to success in a re-entry program.

Randy Van Osdol

One of the Co-Founders of the Gallatin County Fresh Start Re-Entry Program

Current Member of the Fresh Start Oversight Committee

Chair, Emergency Housing Committee, Fresh Start Re-Entry Program